

SYNODICAL SERVICES I

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Guidelines for Congregations and Former Pastors

A. *Materials*: Board of Trustees Report (Polity sections II, A, 8 and Appendix A), pp. 27, 45-52

B. *Background*

Synod 2008, in response to Overture 4 (*Agenda for Synod 2008*, p. 258), instructed the Board of Trustees to instruct the office of Pastor-Church relations to draft “guidelines” for congregations and their former pastors (*Acts of Synod 2008*, p. 521). Appendix A of the BOT report (*Agenda for Synod 2009*, p. 51-52) provides background for this issue and sets the guidelines and recommendations below in their proper context. Overture 4 from 2008 also provides helpful background information for this conversation. The following brief quote from the Pastor-Church Relations guideline report is instructive: “One dynamic often overlooked in the development of healthy congregations is the relationship of former pastors to their congregations. It would be helpful for the denomination to provide guidance and clarity to this important relationship” (*Agenda for Synod 2009*, p. 45).

C. *Recommendations*

1. That synod encourage use of the following guidelines for relationships between congregations and former pastors:
 - a. That pastors and councils of congregations recognize the significant implications of former pastors remaining in the congregation and become informed of the prevalence and types of problems that can arise when the former pastor does remain. This is particularly important when there is a tendency in the former pastor or the church council to minimize the potential difficulties and accentuate the potential advantages of his/her remaining with the congregation.
 - b. That the decision of the former pastor to remain in his/her previous church not be viewed as entirely the prerogative of the former pastor. Pastors and councils are advised to view the decision as having weight similar to that of the decision to originally call the pastor to this church. Therefore, the discernment process and decision ought to include the pastor, the council, and possibly representatives of the congregation and classis.

- c. That a “waiting period” approach not be seen in itself as a sufficient strategy for addressing the potential hazards inherent in the relationship. The waiting period may be part of a strategy, but other variables ought also to be considered.
 - d. That pastors and councils seek communal clarity in these matters through an intentional conversation resulting in a written agreement signed by the former pastor, the council, and, in some cases, representatives of the classis. (Samples of such agreements are available through Pastor Church relations.)
 - e. That, in situations where the former pastor does remain, the written and signed agreement convey a high level of clarity to ensure that appropriate boundaries are understood by the former pastor, the council, and the congregation and that the incoming pastor and future councils are not prevented from addressing potential difficulties that may arise.
 - f. That any written agreement between a former pastor and the congregation be reviewed at least on an annual basis and that adjustments to the agreement be considered if deemed necessary by the former pastor, the current pastor, or members of the church council.
2. That synod request the Board of Trustees to instruct the Office of Pastor-Church Relations to collect and develop relevant resources and make them available to pastors and churches.
 3. That synod request the BOT to review the effectiveness of these guidelines after three years and recommend appropriate adjustments to Synod 2013. This review will include specific input from diverse cultural perspectives.